

CHAPTER ONE

From Dynastic to “National History”

The modern territorial nation and linear history have an intimate relationship. Indeed, one might say that they co-produce each other as the principal mode of belonging in the twentieth century. Individuals learn to identify with nation-states that have supposedly evolved over a long history to reach the self-conscious unity of the two and are thus poised to acquire mastery over the future.¹

Prasenjit Duara, 1998

Introduction: The Dynastic History of Siam²

Few instruments of power are as vital for the modern Thai state as the idea of a bounded nation-state and its corresponding history. To understand nationalism and nation-building in modern Siam, it is therefore crucial to look at how present-day national Thai History was achieved. The official history of Thailand is taught in schools and colleges as a ceaseless forward march of the nation, beginning in ancient times when the Thai people lived in China. The golden age of the mighty Kingdom of Nan Chao (Nanzhao) which they had established in Yunnan, was followed by a mighty fall and swift resurrection.

Driven out by the Mongols, the Thais entered mainland Southeast Asia. By the thirteenth century, they had established their first kingdom after freeing themselves from the yoke of the Khmer of Angkor. The Kingdom of Sukhothai was ruled by the benevolent hero-kings Si Inthathit (?1240s–?1270s) and Ramkhamhaeng (?1279–1298), who brought the Thais another golden age.

In 1351, the second kingdom was founded by King Uthong in the city of Ayutthaya. It remained the main centre of the Thais for more than 400 years, governed by another set of hero-kings (aided by very few women) such as Naresuan (1590–1605) and Narai (1656–88), until, in 1767, Ayutthaya was defeated and sacked by the Burmese. The Thais successfully fought back.

After the defeat of the eternal enemy from the West came the last and present Kingdom of Rattanakosin/Bangkok with ten great King Ramas of the Chakri Dynasty.³ Siam preserved her independence and became modern during the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) who was followed, two generations later, by another great modernizer who steered Thailand through a troublesome time of change, King Bhumibol Adulyadej (1927–2016).

Following this national history of Siam, the story of Siam's geo-body, as Thongchai Winichakul's *Siam Mapped* (1994) deemed it, would appear neatly woven, linear, progressive, and easily traced back through lines of kings, dynasties and kingdoms.⁴ Yet, the objective historian recognizes this line of interpretation and presentation as obviously modern and, more importantly, imagined and created. A close look at how the Thai ruling elite has come to view its past in this manner is revealing.

An article written by King Mongkut in the mid-nineteenth century highlights the artificial construction of the history of Siam. It was published in 1851 in Canton, China. That year, Rama III (Nangklae), a half-brother of Mongkut, passed away after reigning for twenty-seven years (1824–51). For all those years, Mongkut had been forced to wear an orange robe as a Buddhist monk. After the death of his half-brother, he immediately disrobed and left his temple, Wat Bowonniwet in Bang Lamphu, to become king. The new ruler's statement was in English, and it is worth quoting in full:

I am just availing myself of an opportunity for searching into some pages of Siamese ancient history, and beg to state that our ancient capital Ayuthia before the year AD 1350, was but the ruin of an ancient place belonging to Kambuja (now known as Cambodia), formerly called

Lawek ... There were other cities not far remote, also possessed by the Kambujans ... Sometime near the year AD 1300, the former inhabitants were much diminished by frequent wars with the northern Siamese and the Peguans, or Mons, so that these cities were vacated ... and nothing remained but their names.

Former inhabitants declared that the people of Chiang-rai, a province of what is now called Chiang-mai (North Laos), and Kampengpet, being frequently subjected to great annoyance from their enemies, deserted their native country and formed a new establishment at Ch'a-liang in the western part of Siam Proper; and built a city which they called Thepha-maha-na-khon, whence has been preserved, in the national records, as the name of our capital down to the present day, Krung-Thepha-maha-nakhon ... and there five kings of the first dynasty reigned, until the sixth, named U-T'ong Rama-thi-bodi ascended the throne in 1314.

This king, it is said, was the son-in-law of his predecessor, who was named Sirichai Chiang Sen, who was without male issue, and therefore the throne descended to the son-in-law by right of the royal daughter. U-T'ong Rama-thi-bodi was a mightier prince than any of his predecessors, and subsequently conquered and subjected to his sway all Southern Siam, and some provinces in the Malayan Peninsula.

He made Ch'a-liang the seat of his government for six years, and then in consequence of the prevalence of disease of a pestilential character, he caused various researches to be made for some more healthy location, and finally fixed upon the site of Ayuthia, and there founded his new capital in April 1350. This date is an ascertained fact. From this period, our Siamese annals are more exact, and the accounts generally reliable—being accompanied by dates and days, months, and years from 1350 to 1767.⁵

It is very clear from King Mongkut's account that the history of his kingdom did not go back very far into the past. The *time* was around 1300 and the *space* was mostly around Ayutthaya or present-day central Thailand; such *space* was very much more connected with the Angkorian Khmer than with the Chinese.⁶

There was no mention of the Thais in China, nor of Sukhothai and the great King Ramkhamhaeng, both of which were central to later versions of "national" history. Of course, the cities of Chaliang, Chiang Saen, and

Chiang Mai further north were mentioned, but only to establish the dynastic line of King Uthong, the founder of Ayutthaya; and this line went back only five generations.

Even as late as 1904, towards the end of the reign of King Chulalongkorn (1868–1910) who is credited with reforming and modernizing Siam, its history did not much differ from that of King Mongkut. That year, the sizeable volume *The Kingdom of Siam* (1904) was prepared by the Siamese Ministry of Agriculture for distribution at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition in St. Louis, Missouri.

The commission overseeing the volume included Prince Vajiravudh, the future King Rama VI, who had just returned from England by way of America and Japan in early 1903; Prince Devawongse (1858–1923), the minister of foreign affairs; Prince Mahisra (1866–1907), the minister of finance; and Chao Phya Devesra, the minister of agriculture.

It is safe to assume that such a book had royal and governmental approval to present the nation's history to a readership at a prominent international event. In Chapter 5 on "Siam from an Historical Standpoint", the volume states:

Little is known about the early history of the country, which was first called Siam by the Portuguese and, following them, by the other nations who first came into contact with it ... Siemlo, the Chinese name, is of equally doubtful etymology, and by the neighboring countries, such as Burmah and Cambodia, the country was called, after the name of its former capital, Sri Ayuddhya ... The Siamese call themselves Thai, probably the equivalent of Franks, the free ones, i.e., free from the foreign (Cambodian) yoke...

The chief source of the earliest history is found in the *Phongsawadan Muang Nua* (The Annals of the North) ... Besides these Annals ... there are local annals, some written in Pali, some in Siamese or Laolian, which also throw a certain light on pre-Buddhistic times...

In the earliest times, before the capital was established at Ayuthia in 1350, there extended throughout the country a number of small principalities. These extended over what is now called Siam, from the borders of China east and west through the valleys of the Menam Chow

Phya and the Menamkong and down the Malay Peninsula, with Ligor as capital, as far south as Malacca ...

The early history of the race shows a continual migration from the north to the south, seeking an outlet to the sea ... until in 1350 the branch of the Tai race known now as Siamese established their capital at Ayuthia ... The history of the Siamese as a dominant power begins from this date ... From the founding of the capital at Ayuthia in 1350 down to its destruction in 1767 by the Burmese ...⁷

As may be seen from the above, again the *time* was 1350, and the *space* was Ayutthaya. However, since the two sources were written in English, it may be that they were meant for foreign consumption only, reflecting what the Thai elite wanted to present to the outside world, especially to the *farang*, and those who mattered and read or spoke English. A look at the presentation of history intended for local consumption gives a clearer picture of actual historical knowledge and construction at that time.

In 1887, King Chulalongkorn commissioned an important project of ninety-two modern large-format oil paintings, illustrating scenes chosen from among those believed to be core events of the past. Each was to be accompanied by poems describing the historical episode.

They were elaborately framed in gold in a modern Western style. The paintings were exhibited at the cremation ceremony of three of King Chulalongkorn's children who died at early ages, along with one of his concubines. The solemn occasion took place at Sanam Luang, the main ground in front of the Grand Palace, and the public was invited to admire these representations of the past.

Tellingly, the first painting was of the foundation of Ayutthaya by King Uthong. Perhaps more importantly, the poem describing the event was written by King Chulalongkorn himself.

The rest followed in a series according to the Ayutthaya and Bangkok *phongsawadan* (chronicles), focusing on hero-kings, their actions, and battles. Of course, these battles were fought to defend the kingdom against the Burmese. The series ended with painting No. 91 portraying Mongkut's ordination and painting No. 92 showing Henry Burney, a British envoy, at an audience with King Rama III in 1825.⁸

It is again important to note that this history exhibition was of a dynastic, rather than national, nature; and the time went back to 1350, the founding date of Ayutthaya, linking King Chulalongkorn, who commissioned the project, through the early Bangkok kings right back to the founder, King Uthong. Therefore, the Bangkok-Chakri Dynasty was historically linked with that of Ayutthaya and no other.

A glance through lists of turn-of-the-century school history textbooks confirms the conception of time and space and the treatment of history then current. In her study of the Ministry of Education history texts from 1897 to 1969, Suphanni Kanchanatthiti, a senior historian, found that the 1895 official curriculum, probably the oldest, required middle school students to read two history books.

The first was *A Brief Chronicle (Phongsawadan) of Ayutthaya* and the second, *A Chronicle (Phongsawadan) of the Present Dynasty*.⁹ She further elaborated that school textbooks from 1897 to 1901 were all about the *phongsawadan* type of history of Ayutthaya and Thonburi-Bangkok.

Suphanni noted that these books were full of detail, “heavy”, boring, and required a great deal of memorization, making them unsuitable for young students. She concluded that one can learn from them more about the good, proper and correct forms of Thai court literary style than about history.¹⁰

Between 1913 and 1931, just before the end of the absolute monarchy, history textbooks were slightly changed in content, and a brief world history was included. More interestingly, a new Thai word coined for history began to appear, though *phongsawadan* was still used.

The new term, found in two textbook titles in 1923 and 1930, was *prawatkan*,¹¹ eventually to be replaced by earlier coinages—*prawatsat* or *prawatisat*—now popularly used to mean history.

A Step towards “National History”

In his acclaimed study of nationalism,¹² Benedict Anderson pointed out the distinction between Chulalongkorn and Vajiravudh as Kings of Siam. In the chapter “Official Nationalism and Imperialism”, Anderson

compared Siam to Japan when both dynasties faced the rise of nationalist movements:

Meiji's contemporary, the long-reigning Chulalongkorn (r. 1868–1910), defended his realm from Western expansion in a style that differed markedly from that of his Japanese opposite number. Squeezed between British Burma and Malaya, and French Indochina, he devoted himself to a shrewd manipulative diplomacy rather than attempting to build up a serious war machine ... Nor was anything much done to push an official nationalism through a modernized educational system ... primary education was not made compulsory till more than a decade after his death, and the country's first university was not set up until 1917, four decades after the founding of the Imperial University of Tokyo ...

Nonetheless, Chulalongkorn regarded himself as a modernizer. But his prime models were neither the United Kingdom nor Germany, but rather the colonial *beamtenstaaten* [official states] of the Dutch East Indies, British Malaya, and the Raj. Following these models meant rationalizing and centralizing royal governments, eliminating traditional semi-autonomous tributary statelets, and promoting economic development somewhat along colonial lines. The most striking example ... was his encouragement of a massive immigration of young single male foreigners to form the disoriented, politically powerless workforce needed to construct port facilities, build railway lines, dig canals, and expand commercial agriculture. This importing of *gastarbeiter* [guest workers] paralleled, indeed was modelled on, the policies of the authorities in Batavia and Singapore. And as in the case of the Netherlands Indies and British Malaya, the great bulk of the labourers imported during the nineteenth century were from southeastern China ... Indeed the policy made good short-term sense for a dynastic state, since it created an impotent working class 'outside' Thai society and left that society largely 'undisturbed'."

For Anderson, Chulalongkorn's Siam was very much a dynastic realm.¹³ And as the king's leadership style was organized around the royal centre, it was logical that the past was treated as dynastic history. However, after the turn of the century, things appear to have changed rapidly. Anderson states:

Wachirawut [Vajiravudh], his son and successor (r. 1910–1925), had to pick up the pieces, modelling himself this time on the self-naturalizing dynasts of Europe. Although—and because—he was educated in late Victorian England, he dramatized himself as his country’s “first nationalist”. The target of this nationalism, however, was neither the United Kingdom, which controlled 90 per cent of Siam’s trade, nor France, which had recently made off with easterly segments of the old realm: it was the Chinese whom his father had so recently and blithely imported. The style of his anti-Chinese stance is suggested by the titles of two of his most famous pamphlets: *The Jews of the Orient* (1914), and *Clogs on Our Wheels* (1915).

Anderson concluded:

Here is a fine example of the character of official nationalism—an anticipatory strategy adopted by dominant groups which are threatened with marginalization or exclusion from an emerging nationally-imagined community. (It goes without saying that Wachirawut also began moving all the policy levers of official nationalism: compulsory state-controlled primary education, state-organized propaganda, official rewriting of history, militarism—here more visible show than the real thing—and endless affirmation of the identity of dynasty and nation).¹⁴

In short, towards the end of Chulalongkorn’s reign and the early years of Vajiravudh’s, the Thai dynastic realm was increasingly being threatened and had to come to terms with “Nation-ness”. Here are the roots of the shift from dynastic to linear “national” (official) history.

Prince Damrong (1862–1943), a half-brother and right-hand man of King Chulalongkorn who served as his minister of education and the interior, would be labelled as “Father of Thai History”.¹⁵ In 1914, Prince Damrong introduced a neatly woven, linear, and progressive interpretation of Thai history. From then on, it was accepted as official and “national” up to the present day.

The prince wrote that the “history of Siam may properly be divided into three periods, namely, (1) when Sukhothai was the capital, (2) when Ayutthaya was the capital, and (3) since Ratanakosin (Bangkok) has been the capital.”¹⁶

This periodization of Thai history became known as *sam krung*, or three capitals (Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Ratanakosin/Bangkok). It focuses on the time when each capital and its kings were considered the centre of historical events.

This sequence was possibly influenced by the European division of history as classical, medieval and modern. According to these divisions, Sukhothai represented the classical, Ayutthaya medieval, and Ratanakosin/Bangkok modern.

Damrong went back even before classical Sukhothai, adding a lengthy elaboration on eras before the capitals of Sukhothai and Ayutthaya in what was, in his day, central modern Siam. He explained, focusing on territories (space) and races (ethnicities), that the "territory of which Siam is now made up was originally occupied by people of two races, the Khmers (Khom) and the Lao."¹⁷ Since Thais were not the original people of Siam, the Prince had to look elsewhere.

By relying on *nangsu farang* (books written by authors of the white race), Prince Damrong had concluded that the

Original home of the Thai was in what is now known as Southern China, in a region stretching from the Yangtse River through Szechuan and Yunnan down to the Lao country¹⁸ ... the Thai had established several independent states¹⁹ ... From about the year B.E. 400, as a result of over-population, these Thais began to emigrate to the South-West and South. Later on, the Chinese, as their power increased, extended their frontiers so as to encroach upon the domain of the Thai who, being thus pressed, were unable to dwell in comfort in the region which they had first occupied. Knowing from their fellows who had emigrated previously that it was easier to support life in the lands to the South-West and South, the Thai thereupon descended into those parts in ever growing numbers.²⁰

The Thai southward migration theory advocated by Prince Damrong was convincingly argued. On their long journey southward from Szechuan-Yunnan, the Thais paused to establish the mighty Kingdom of Nan Chao (Nanzhao) in Yunnan, which lasted from the sixth to the mid-thirteenth centuries.

The Prince elaborated at length about Nan Chao (Nanzhao), explaining the hybrid name derivation of the kingdom as from the Chinese (Nan meaning south), whereas Chao (*zhao*) is a Thai word for lord. “For the better understanding of my reader”, the historian prince explained, “I shall henceforward refer to Nan Chao (Nanzhao) as *muang Thai doem*, the original country of the Thai.”²¹

To illustrate his point, the names of the rulers Meng Hsi-nu-lo /Khun Luang (d. 678), Sheng-luo-pi (712–728), P’i-lo-ko/Pilaoko (728–750), and Ko-lo-feng/Khun Luang Fa (750–778) were cited and their actions regarding the Chinese discussed.²² Of the Nan Chao (Nanzhao), Damrong concluded that the

Family of King Hsi-Nu-Lo ruled for thirteen generations, extending over a period of 255 years. The customs of the country became more and more assimilated to those of China, owing to the continual influx of Chinese settlers ... In BE 1797 (1254), the Mongols of the Yuan dynasty conquered China, extending their territory to the South-West and subduing the original Thai homeland at the same time as they conquered Burma.²³

Nan Chao (Nanzhao) was lost, but the link continued. Prince Damrong argued that while the Thais were still powerful in their “original home”, many had already migrated to the valleys of the Salween, while some went as far as Arakan and Assam. Large numbers had settled down in northern Vietnam and Laos, and

about the year BE 1400 (CE 857), a powerful Thai monarch named Phraya Chao Phrom (or King Brahma, the first of the line of King Uthong who founded Ayutthaya) succeeded in wresting territory from the Khmers ... [for] the first Thai settlement on the southern bank of the River Mekhong [south of the present-day Golden Triangle].²⁴

The last few lines here are crucial to understanding how the Prince established a link between the “original Thai” and their “original home” (*muang Thai doem*) in southern China on the one hand, and on the other, with King Uthong, founder of Ayutthaya at the heart of modern Siam. A linear and progressive history had been completely and satisfactorily created. The time was pushed back from 1350 to around 850.

Damrong’s interpretation stretched Thai history back 500 years, if counted from the time of King Phrom, or 800 from Hsi-nu-lo/Khun Luang of Nan Chao (Nanzhao). Meanwhile, the space had been vastly enlarged to cover an area from Sukhothai/Ayutthaya up to the Yangtze and Szechuan-Yunnan.

It included the mainland of Southeast Asia: Shan states in Burma, northern Laos, Vietnam, and Assam in India. The Thais were older and bigger than the Angkorian Empire.

The Thai “nation” suddenly appeared very ancient. It had a good past (Nan Chao [Nanzhao], Sukhothai, and Ayutthaya) and progressed linearly to modern times (1914). This was a history that had, and probably still has, a profound emotional effect on urban educated Thais.

It is unsurprising then to learn that the respected Sino-Thai linguist, anthropologist, and ethnographer Phraya Anuman (1888–1967), is believed to have felt overwhelmed when he stood at the northern tip of modern Siam, in Chiang Rai Province. He imagined a stream of Thais emerging from China into modern Siam on the Southeast Asian mainland.²⁵

***Farang*—King Vajiravudh and the Contestation**

Why the change from dynastic to “national history”? Three factors were involved. First was the Thai elite’s contact with the West, especially with *farang*, or white people. Second was the impact of Vajiravudh, King Rama VI, and his official nationalist policies. Third was domestic pressures and challenges from a new urban educated social stratum, along with a newly emerging free press.

Doubtless, the linear and progressive version of national history resulted from the elite’s contact with the West. As Craig J. Reynolds pointed out,

[W]e might find that the dominant story types of Western culture have traveled with the global structures of capitalism and the nation-state, a form of the state put in place by elites who had lived and studied in the West. Modern Thai historiography is, to a large extent, a Western import, though it bears some unmistakable features of being a Thai historiography.²⁶

Although Thais from the generations of Mongkut and Chulalongkorn-Damrong did not dwell or study in the West, they were highly familiar with its core values and ideas. Mongkut was one of the first Thais to learn how to speak and write English, mainly by teaching himself and associating with missionaries.

The future King Chulalongkorn, his brothers and sisters, as well as ladies of the court were tutored by different foreign teachers.

The best-remembered of these is Anna Leonowens, whose fictionalized memoir later inspired the Broadway musical comedy *The King and I*.²⁷ A handful of Thai elites followed the same path as the royal children. Some went overseas to get a Western colonial education in British schools in neighbouring Penang and Singapore.

In the 1880s, by the time Chulalongkorn's children were of school-going age, a tradition had started in which princes and other sons of the nobility were sent to elite schools in western Europe, especially England. This was the beginning of a long line of a new breed—the *nakrian nok* (returning students from overseas education).

When these foreign-educated pupils reappeared in Siam, they enjoyed much influence, easily rising in bureaucratic careers. They had huge advantages over their domestically educated counterparts, the *nakrian nai*, and were far more successful materially.

In short, Western education, whether formal or informal, overseas or domestic, had become part of the Thai elite's world since the latter part of the nineteenth century. They knew about the West from classrooms, books, or newspapers, and were also in physical contact with powerful and civilized *farang* at home and overseas: missionaries, merchants, diplomats, teachers, and friends.

It might be useful to visualize the kind of social environment in which the Thai elite encountered *farang*. The experience probably made them more conscious of their own identity. It is easy to imagine that the *farang* often asked about Siam this and that, as well as being Thai or about Thai things.

Phaithūn Phongsabut, a geographer, and Wilatwong Phongsabut, a historian, both at Chulalongkorn University, observed that works by *farang* scholars on the Thai race and the original Thai homeland had a profound

impact on the writing of Thai “national history”, probably as early as the turn of the nineteenth century.

For example, in his *Cradle of the Shan Race* (1885), Albert Terrien de Lacouperie (1844–94), an orientalist at University College, London, was likely the first to suggest that the Thais originally lived in Central China before migrating south. He came to this conclusion by comparing different Tai dialects of Southeast Asia and those spoken in China. At about the same time, others arrived at similar conclusions.

Archibald Ross Colquhoun (1848–1914), first Administrator of Southern Rhodesia (1890–94), a self-governing British colony in Africa, was among these pioneers. Colquhoun led several exploratory expeditions to Assam, Burma, Indochina and southern China.

In his volume *Across Chryse: Being the Narrative of a Journey of Exploration Through the South China Border Lands from Canton to Mandalay* (1883), Colquhoun suggested that the Thais were from Yunnan. His proposal was further confirmed by Edward Harper Parker (1849–1926), a British consular official in Hainan, in his essay published in *The Chinese Recorder*, “The Old Thai Empire” (March 1894). This was when Nan Chao (Nanzhao) was first identified as a Thai kingdom.²⁸

These are some examples of works in which the Thai ruling elite had to engage with a *farang*-dominated new world. The situation never existed in the early Ratanakosin/Bangkok days of the first two King Ramas (1782–1824). They were never confronted by questions of race or the original Thai homeland.

Their Thai world was religious and dynastic, not national. But by the middle of the nineteenth century, when Western models of nationhood were being emulated, copied and pirated, it became necessary to deal with the issues of race and homeland.

Culture was a crucial mediating force because Siam had abundant religious relics, pagodas, Buddha images, and Hindu statues that were studied and classified by Western scholars from the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands, Germany and other nations. Identities such as Dvaravati Mon, Angkorian Khmer, and other terms relating to race or kingdom were duly attached to archaeological artefacts.

Consequently, the Thais came to believe that their original homeland was elsewhere. China and Nan Chao (Nanzhao) were proposed as sites of origin upon “scientific” grounds. They seemed appropriate and archeologically (*borankhadi*) correct.²⁹

By the start of the twentieth century, Western-style interest in antiquity and a search for the past had become accepted and even fashionable among the Thai ruling elite. Their contacts with—and frequent visits to—Western colonies in Southeast Asia, plus first-hand knowledge of European civilization gave them access to organizations of learning, such as the Royal Asiatic Society, the École française d’Extrême-Orient (EFEO), and many museums, libraries and journals.

One effect was that a series of activities and institutions were established. In 1904, the Siam Society was founded under the patronage of Crown Prince Vajiravudh, who had just returned from his studies in the United Kingdom.

Among the first articles in the *Journal of the Siam Society* was Prince Damrong’s “The Foundation of Ayuthia”.³⁰ Thai history was discussed, proposed, and in some way, also created in the journal. In 1905, the Ho Samut Samrap Phra Nakhon, or Bangkok Library,³¹ was launched, again with the Crown Prince as president. It was not entirely new, since its predecessor, the Vajirayana Library, had been inaugurated in memory of King Mongkut.

In 1907, the Royal Research Society (*Samakhom subsuan khong buran nai prathet sayam*, later changed to *Borankhadi Samoson* or Antiquarian Society) was also started. These institutions were mechanisms to search for, and learn about, Thainess while promoting official nationalism. From these endeavors grew what is known as Thai studies today. Such studies of antiquity had a particularly acute political and psychological impact upon the Thai ruling elite and the urban educated.

The second point to stress is the impact of Vajiravudh, Rama VI, and his official nationalist policy. As suggested above, the last ten years of King Chulalongkorn’s reign were crucial for understanding changes within Thai society in connection with a nation-state’s emergence and search for new historiography.

When Vajiravudh returned from England in 1902 at the age of twenty-one, after a nine-year educational sojourn in England, he was poised to become the first king who was a *nakrian nok*. Indeed, he differed from his predecessors on the throne.

As a prince and later king (1910–25), Vajiravudh was considered rather aloof; he isolated himself from his father's large and active palace family, relatives, and the bureaucracy. In the early years of his reign, he often stayed at the newly built Sanam Chandra Palace in Nakhon Pathom Province, 56 kilometres outside Bangkok. He surrounded himself with a male entourage and occupied himself in singular ways. The Bangkok circle likely thought of him as somewhat *plaek* or *pralad* (strange or unusual).

The fifteen years he spent on the throne fell between the long, successful absolutist forty-two-year reign of his father and the relatively weak and unsuccessful effort by the brother who succeeded him, Prajadhipok (Rama VII; 1925–35).

As a highly prolific author, Vajiravudh is now officially remembered as Phra Maha Dhiraratchao, or the Great Scholar King. He signed around 200 travelogues, plays, poetry, songs, articles, and sermons with over 100 pen names. He is also known for his official nationalistic policy which earned him the title of Father of Thai Nationalism.³²

The reign of Vajiravudh was a time of change. The first work stoppages by Bangkok's Chinese merchants and labourers occurred just before his first coronation on 11 November 1910. The next year, the Celestial Monarchy in Peking abruptly ended.³³

February 1912 saw an attempted coup, known as *Kabot R.S. 130*, or the 1912 Rebellion, aimed at overthrowing Vajiravudh. It happened only a few months after the thirteen-day extravaganza of his second coronation in November 1911.

Indeed, the 1900s and 1910s differed from previous years. With domestic changes, a new, albeit small, educated middle class emerged, several of whom were Sino-Thai, critical of their absolute monarchy. The time was also marked by the spread of a free press claiming to represent *paksiang* (mouth and voice) of the common people; in addition, print capitalism³⁴ also made people think of their status in society differently.

And as mentioned before, the rise of nationalism—along with the fall of monarchies in Europe and Asia (the Qing, Ottomans, Romanovs, Habsburgs)—motivated King Vajiravudh to consolidate his rule and compelled him to embark on an individual nationalist policy.

On 1 May 1911, not long after his first coronation, Vajiravudh founded the Wild Tigers Corps (*sue pa*), a royal national paramilitary force intended to “instill the love of the nation” among the Thai. On 1 July, he followed it up by establishing the Boy Scouts (*luk sua*, meaning cubs or male offspring of a tiger).

The Wild Tigers Corps was soon criticized as an unprofessional extension of the king’s personal bodyguards. Military leaders did not approve, and the corps was dissolved soon after the reign ended. Yet within the Wild Tigers circle, the king launched his nationalist programmes. He personally lectured them about *chat* (nation), *satsana* (religion), and *phra maha kasat* (great king),³⁵ which became the three pillars of Siamese modern state ideology; since then, this so-called Holy Trinity has been exploited frequently by right-wing military regimes.

King Vajiravudh used different strategies in historiography and constructing historical narratives to achieve the policy of *pluk chat-pluk chai* or Wake the Nation and the Heart. Doing so, he coined a new Thai term for history, *prawatisat* (from the Pali-Sanskrit: *paravati* + *sastra* or science of recording).

He may have found the established Thai word *phongsawadan* unsuitable in a global context since its direct translation, referring to the reincarnation of a royal family, did not appear sufficiently modern. *Prawatisat* caught on, and by 1917 the word was frequently seen in titles of history texts.³⁶

Following the Thai ruling elite’s aforementioned interest in antiquity, one important outing for Vajiravudh was to visit the “classical heartland of the Thai”. In 1907, the Crown Prince voyaged to Kamphaengphet, Sukhothai, Sawankhalok, Uttaradit and Phitsanulok.

The trip took four months by train, boat and horse. Vajiravudh clearly intended to “discover” the Sukhothai Kingdom. He went very well prepared, taking along copies of translations of King Ramkhamhaeng’s *Inscription*

(translated into modern Thai by the French scholar of Southeast Asian archaeology and history George Cœdès, not long before this trip).

He also carried a copy of the translation of a Sukhothai inscription, the *Phongsawadan Nua* (Chronicle of the North), and a *Phongsawadan Krung Si Ayutthaya*. These served in some ways as his guidebooks. The Prince examined most of the major ruins in those five cities. He noted details of his observations and added extensive comments, using the inscription and *phongsawadan* as references. He compared them with sites in Egypt.³⁷

The outcome of the trip was a sizeable volume entitled *Ruang Thieo Muang Phra Ruang* (A Tour of the Phra Ruang Country 1908) printed with photographs and an appendix consisting of King Ramkhamhaeng’s Inscription. In a preface, Vajiravudh expressed the hope that his writings and discoveries would make Thais “aware that Our Thai Nation (*chat Thai*) is not a new nation, and not a nation of barbarians, or what is called in English ‘uncivilized’”.³⁸

In short, Vajiravudh not only “discovered” Sukhothai but gave life to ruins that had been abandoned and covered with trees and vines for over a century since the late 1700s. His observations and comments became part of the plot for a linear history to be developed in full by Prince Damrong in 1914, as mentioned above.

This trip set the stage for what would later become Sukhothai-ism among the Thai ruling class. From then on, the ruins of Sukhothai symbolized the golden age of national Thai history. Sukhothai’s stone inscriptions and *phongsawadan* written records would become sources of inspiration, sparking the imaginations of professional and amateur Thai historians.

To them, Sukhothai was an exceptional Buddhist realm of righteous kings “elected” by public consent; it was rich and fertile with “fish in water and rice in the fields”.³⁹

His upper-class education in Victorian England had familiarized Vajiravudh with Shakespeare, operetta and English language popular theatre. Indeed, the king fell very much in love with English literature and drama. He translated into Thai *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Merchant of Venice*,

and *As You Like It*. He also restaged many plays and performances he had seen in England, from *Othello* to Gilbert and Sullivan's *Mikado* for court audiences. He even acted in many of them. These included the 1888 play *My Friend Jarlet* (as *Mittara Teah* or *True Friend*) by Arnold Golsworthy (1865–1939) and E.B. Norman, a work which outside Thailand has been largely forgotten, as well as its authors.

It was in this context that the king began to turn episodes from the *phongsawadan* into plays to “waken” the Nation (*pluk chat*). Of his many plays, two featuring legendary heroes are worth mentioning. They are the stories of *Phra Ruang* and *Thao Saenpom*, illuminating Vajiravudh's type of nationalism and construction of linear history.

Three *Phra Ruang* plays exist: a dance drama from 1912, a modernized version in 1914, and a later musical in the Bangkok style from 1924. The best-remembered today is the 1914 play originally prepared for the king's Wild Tigers entourage.⁴⁰ It was formerly included in high school textbooks. Vajiravudh found the plot in the *Phongsawadan Nua* (Chronicle of the North) which he carried along on his 1907 tour, although at the time he commented that the document was unreliable on historical facts.⁴¹

According to the chronicle, Phra Ruang was Governor of Lopburi (Lavo), just north of Ayutthaya. His duty was to send water as a tribute to the king of Angkor. Using a magic spell, Phra Ruang could command water to remain in bamboo baskets. Upon learning that a man had such powers, the Angkorian king sent a soldier to execute Phra Ruang, who fled to Sukhothai.

The Khmer soldier chased after him by diving into the earth, emerging on the grounds of the Temple of the Great Relics (Wat Phra Si Rattana Mahathat) in Sukhothai, where he eventually found Phra Ruang. Not recognizing him, the soldier asked the governor himself where he might be found. Using magic, Phra Ruang advised the soldier to stay and wait there. The Khmer immediately turned to stone and has stayed put there ever since. Seeing that Phra Ruang had such miraculous powers, the people of Sukhothai “invited/elected” him to be their king. End of story.

By transforming this tale into a play, Vajiravudh modernized and rationalized it to fit a modern nation. For him, Phra Ruang was a Thai king of Lopburi, a vassal of Cambodia. Phra Ruang was ingenious, having invented the basket for carrying water, light enough for long-distance transportation from the central Menam basin to Angkor.

Upon learning of such a clever Thai, the Khmer king sent his commander to eliminate him. The commander went underground (not diving into the earth as in the original version) to find Phra Ruang. He went all the way to Sukhothai, where Phra Ruang was hiding. He met the king, whom he did not recognize, and asked how to find him. Phra Ruang told him to wait, called his men to arrest the Khmer, and had chased him back to Cambodia, effectively freeing the Thais from the Cambodian yoke.

In his preface to the play, Vajiravudh said that Phra Ruang was a “*ruang ching*” or true story.⁴² After peeling off all the miraculous and fabulous camouflage, he suggested, historical verity remained. He identified Phra Ruang with a figure in the Ramkhamhaeng Inscription.

In his opinion, Phra Ruang was Si Intrathit, the first king of Sukhothai. He made the Thais independent and in return, the local population invited him to be their monarch. By matching the story in the chronicle with information from the inscription and a touch of modern rationalist interpretation, Vajiravudh had constructed the first Thai capital and dynasty, forming a link with previous dynasties in China and with later ones in Ayutthaya and Ratanakosin/Bangkok.

There was a further extravagant attempt to link Sukhothai with Ratanakosin/Bangkok and the Chakri Dynasty. In 1925, preparations were made for an exhibition to showcase the products and culture of Siam at the site now known as Suan Lumpini, on what was then the outskirts of Bangkok. The Bangkok Expo was meant to be a grand event, like those popular in Europe and the United States, which Vajiravudh had experienced while studying in England from 1893 to 1902.

For the fifteenth anniversary of the king’s accession to the throne, it was deemed appropriate to have such a grand exhibition to promote Siam as a modern, although unindustrialized, nation. However, the king

felt badly ill and passed away on 25 November 1925. The Bangkok Expo never occurred. Yet a commemorative volume entitled *Souvenir of the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition at Lumbini Park B.E. 2468* was prepared for print. Two years later, in 1927, it was published in English and Thai with compelling illustrations.

The section “Historical Sketch of Siam” features a photo of a ruined pagoda. The caption reads *The Seven Rows of Pagodas, Swankaloke, The Middle One Being the Abiding Place of the Relics of the First of the Chakri Dynasty*. This was an attempt to link the Chakri, or probably Vajiravudh himself, with the Sukhothai-Phra Ruang Dynasty, a line some 600 years distant, back to the thirteenth century. It is difficult, almost impossible, to prove any such connection. But nations and nationalism may imagine what is unprovable.

Thin-Skinned

The other play was *Thao Saenpom* or The King Who Had a Hundred Thousand Bumps on His Body. In it, King Vajiravudh again “demythologized the history of the father of the founder of Ayutthaya”.⁴³ As the historian Walter F. Vella pointed out, Thao Saenpom was not turned into a national hero as Phra Ruang had been. Yet by removing the miraculous and fabulous coating around this legendary figure, Vajiravudh again concluded that his hero was real and historical. He established a link between King Uthong’s father and branches of ruling Thai families who had migrated across the Mekong into present-day northern Siam.

In 1913, in a handwritten memorandum, the king theorized at length about Thao Saenpom, including where he came from and what he had done. He cited his discussions and arguments on the subject with Prince Damrong and another scholar, Ayutthaya governor Phraya Boran (Phon Tejagupta, 1871–1936), about whether Uthong’s city was located south of Kamphaengphet, or Nakhon Pathom, or Suphanburi.

The opinions of these royal-aristocratic historians differed in detail to an extent beyond the scope of this chapter. They shared one vision in common: a linear history of the Thai nation and the steady southward migration of the Thai people.⁴⁴

As is clear from the above account, those involved in the making and writing of history were kings, princes, and other members of the nobility. Modern Thai national history thus appears as a craft of the ruling elite. It was a prerogative of the ruling elite of the dynastic realm.

An Ayutthayan law describes the daily royal routine from 7:00 a.m. until late at night, specifying that at 1:00 a.m., the *Phongsawadan* is to be read to the king before His Majesty retires to bed.⁴⁵

Royal manuscripts were jealously guarded and regarded as sacred. They were kept at the centre of power and were not intended for the public. In the mid-nineteenth century, when one officer got a newfangled bourgeois idea and printed the *kotmai tra sam duang*, or Three Seals Law, for sale, Rama III had the books confiscated and enshrined in a pagoda at Wat Saket in Bangkok.

It took an outsider to break the taboo. By 1863, Rama III was long gone and Mongkut, his half-brother, had become Rama VI (r. 1851–68). Dan Beach Bradley (1804–73), an American Protestant missionary from Marcellus, New York, defied tradition by printing a *Phongsawadan* in two volumes. They were for sale and were allowed to circulate freely. Bradley was a key figure in bringing print capitalism and modern journalism to Siam. He was the first to translate the American Constitution into Thai language, published in his own journal in the late 1860s.

This English language journal, *The Bangkok Recorder*, received subscription requests from seventeen princes, fifty-seven noblemen, seven foreigners (*farang* and Chinese), and nineteen monks and commoners⁴⁶ for a total circulation of only 100. The literate circle, mostly male, of Bangkok was still very limited.

This first newspaper of Siam was printed monthly from 1844 to 1845 and again from 1865 to 1867. It did not prosper commercially. Nevertheless, printing had become a competitive business. Another American missionary, Samuel Smith, founded his own printing house, issuing the *Siam Weekly Advertiser* and *Siam Repository*. For a time, King Mongkut likewise had his court announcements printed as *ratchakitchanubeksa*, the Royal Gazette. In 1873, in the era of Chulalongkorn, the Royal Printing House was established.

Nevertheless, the ruling elite began to gradually lose their prerogatives, as David K. Wyatt has noted:

Late in the Fifth Reign and early in the Sixth, a handful of mavericks, outsiders, trenchantly criticized the existing social, economic, and political order. Noteworthy among them were the turn-of-the-century journalists and essayists K.S.R. Kularb and Thianwan, both commoners.

Craig J. Reynolds called K.S.R. Kularb (1834–1913) a “challenge to royal historical writing” and Walter Vella praised Thianwan as “a man who fought giants”.⁴⁷ Both became known through print capitalism and belong to the first group of nationalists from humble backgrounds.⁴⁸ Kularb became involved with the realm of royal history.

He was born in Bangkok at a time when Western influence, especially the printing press and journalism, first made itself felt. His father was Chinese, while his mother was from the Nakhon Ratchasima (known as Korat) official class. He grew up in a minor princely residence, became a novice and later a monk, thus receiving a traditional Thai education.

But he represented not only old Siam but also the modern West, during the fifteen years that he toiled as a clerk for several *farang* companies. Reportedly he travelled widely to Singapore, Penang, Sumatra, Manila, Batavia, Macao, Hong Kong and Calcutta. Some even claim that he went as far as England which would have outdone some Siamese kings and princes.

By the 1880s, Kularb was known and respected as a learned man in the small-scale educated circle of the Bangkok elite. He stood out because of his background as a commoner, as well as his energetic printing and writing. He had become a bibliophile, with a large personal library. In 1882, on the occasion of the Bangkok-Chakri Centennial, Kularb joined a royal exhibition by showcasing 1,000 books from his private collection.

In the 1890s, he became an editor and published his own journal, *Sayam praphet*. A prolific author, he wrote many works expressing changes that took place during the transitional nineteenth century. He published biographies and genealogies of important individuals and families of Siam, an unusual activity at the time.

Eventually, this practice got him into trouble with the Palace, when he wrote a biography of a Supreme Patriarch. Kularb was accused of *lèse*

majesté and fabrication. After the investigation was over, he was sent for a one-month hospital stay to be “cured” of his “madness” (a new notion of punishment in modern Siam).⁴⁹

After that, his reputation was tarnished. The ruling elite, which had no interest in a writer from outside its circles, had successfully associated him with lies, fabrication, invention, shamelessness, and madness.

As Reynolds pointed out, his crime was likely “borrowing” and “pirating” royal documents, which he later edited and published in different versions. This infuriated the ruling elite.

In 1897, Kularb wrote an essay, “On the Independence of a Country”. He presented it as a series of questions and answers exchanged by a father and son, including some recondite references from *Phongsawadan* and other ancient texts:

Q: What must one do to remain a civilized and independent country?

A: To remain independent and prosperous, a country must have four qualities. It must:

- (1) be a land of the Buddha,
- (2) be a Kingdom ruled with law and order,
- (3) have a good Government and
- (4) have good people.

This was Kularb’s idea of the nation, which he formulated long before the triad of nation, religion, and king of Vajiravudh. Notably, he emphasized good leadership and good relations between king and people as mutually dependent masters and servants. As Reynolds put it,

Evidence exists that [Kularb] had a part in awakening nationalist sentiments, speaking sometimes as a cultural nationalist by criticizing European handkerchiefs, Egyptian cigarettes, Swedish matches, and imported whisky in which faddish residents of Bangkok indulged. But his reaction was not so much one of xenophobia but of dismay at the lack of confidence in the Siamese way.⁵⁰

In his publication *Ayatiwat* (Growth or Progress; 1911)⁵¹ he compiled 136 stories about “changes from old to new customs”, offering a vivid picture

of what was happening in the top echelons of Thai society at the time. He wanted to inform and alert his public readership, the small urban educated class in Bangkok, about changes taking place. The cover of *Ayatiwat* was decorated with his seal and picture inside a rose (his name Kularb, a word derived from the Persian, means rose).

On it he wrote “*Ayatiwat*: A book for knowledge of the *people*, on the changes of various official customs, from old to new, 136 stories, useful for officials and the *public* to know.”⁵² Kularb survived until the age of 79, but by the time he died in 1913, he had been reduced to an impoverished, marginalized status.

Kularb’s life and work indicate that the rise of nationalism and nationness in Siam was not just hierarchical. This becomes more explicit in a PhD thesis by Matthew Phillip Copeland, *Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam*.⁵³

Copeland convincingly argues that the role of the Chakri kings in the “early history of Thai nationalism has been grossly overstated”, that attempts to make monarchy the “focal point of Thai nationalist sentiment met with little success”, and that Thai nationalism is a matter of contestation between the “ruling elite and a disenfranchised urban literato”.⁵⁴

Copeland observed that many royal nationalist programmes triggered criticism, contestation, and reinterpretations, of the concept of *samakkhi* or unity, patriotism, nationalism, and most controversially, races and the Chinese. From 1912 to 1915, Vajiravudh wrote essays under his penname Asvabahu, promoting his ideas of the nation.

Using strong and sharp language, they invited responses, backlash, and sometimes outright ridicule. Vajiravudh promoted unity, but his critics from among the disenfranchised urban literati countered with diversity.

For example, in his 1915 essay on “True Nationhood”, Vajiravudh wrote that there were many interpretations of *chat*, or Nations. Some were held by those who claimed that they were *samai mai*, or modern, but this group was merely following the *farang*, or Westerners. Vajiravudh compared them with Thewathat, the enemy of the Buddha, because following these people would amount to destroying the nation. He went on to elaborate on which words were beneficial to the nation.

He put it simply: words which created unity, yes, but division, no. He concluded that what was national was determined by one’s language. To him, nation and language were one.

A further requirement was loyalty. “If he loves and is loyal to the King of Siam, he is, therefore, really Thai (*Thai thae thae*).” On the other hand, if one considered oneself free, with no loyalty to anyone, one must be stateless, since no one person or group can be established as a separate nation.

Such essays triggered heated reactions over who were the “nation’s real patriots”. There was even an assertion implying that the “false patriots” of the realm were none other than Vajiravudh and his courtiers.⁵⁵

His 1914 essay, “Jews of the Orient” was controversial, suggesting that, according to one academic, the “Anglicized monarch had imbibed the particular racisms of the English ruling class”.⁵⁶ It also met with mild to extreme approval, but hostile reactions were common, especially from the Sino-Thai community.

Copeland referred to an editorial in *Chino-Sayam Warasap*, Thailand’s first daily Chinese newspaper, which urged its readers to oppose such discriminatory views. However, the tone of the editorial was highly restrained. The editor

also offered a brief explanation of how he conceived of his “duties” as a Sino-Thai, asking readers to judge for themselves whether he posed a threat to the nation. Among other things, he noted that he had a responsibility to promote justice in Siam, to not only love justice as an abstract principle but also to make sure that it was afforded to “people of all races” so that none could claim that the kingdom had no justice to give them... he felt there was nothing right about unjustly maligning “fellow citizens of Chinese descent.”⁵⁷

On 22 July 1917, King Vajiravudh declared war against Germany and the Central Powers. The declaration, drafted by the king himself, stated that Siam wished to defend the “peace of the world”, “respect for small states”, and the “sanctity of International Rights”.⁵⁸ An expeditionary force of 1,300 soldiers was sent to Europe. They marched under a new three-

coloured national flag: red (symbolizing the nation), white (religion), and blue (king). The symbol of Siam had thus been changed from an image of a white elephant before a red background to fall in line with iconographic norms of the civilized West. War became an act of nation-building.

The king's declaration was therefore praised as wise and practical because "first, [Siam] will secure her place as an independent nation.... she will throw off extraterritorial rights which now brand her as a nation of inferior civilization ... (and) relieve her of unequal and unfair tariff agreements."⁵⁹

But the king's policy did not go unchallenged. Narin Phasit (1874–1959),⁶⁰ a controversial gadfly, opposed the war declaration, claiming that "Siam should just sit still. Joining the war is like joining a pack of dogs' (*ma mu*, or when dogs gang up to attack others). Narin was jailed for two years.⁶¹ But he had already taken a place among those who joined the "contest for the Nation" like Kularb, Thianwan, and other political journalists.

Narin had served as governor of Nakhon Nayok, but had resigned in 1911, disgusted by bureaucracy. He proceeded to found his own press, propagating ideas about nation, religion, and monarchy. He published pamphlets like *Choie bamrung chat* [Help and Care for the Nation] and launched *Khana yindi kan kadkhan* [Glad to Oppose Party], to help exploited and underprivileged people petition the king.

One of Narin's most important achievements was successfully disputing *ngoen ratchupakan*, a head tax levied upon the population. He managed to eliminate it after the coup of 1932; the new government went along with Narin's long, patient campaign.

In terms of religion, Narin accused the *sangha*, the community of monks, of materialism. He overturned Thai men's monopoly on Buddhist ordination by having his daughter ordained as a monk, a tradition he claimed existed in Buddha's time, but had lapsed in modern Siam. As for the monarchy, Narin campaigned for the rehabilitation of King Taksin, whom he respected for restoring the independence of Siam after the fall of Ayutthaya in 1767.

Taksin was portrayed by early Bangkok *phongsawadan* as having gone insane, a claim that was used to justify his execution by Rama I, a

Siamese general who created a new dynasty, the Chakri, in 1782. Since the mid-nineteenth century, Taksin’s Chineseness was exaggerated to weaken his legitimacy as a king of Siam. King Mongkut wrote, “The first king established in Bangkok was an extraordinary man of Chinese origin, named Pin Tat. He was called by the Chinese Tia Sin Tat, or Tuat.”⁶²

That does not necessarily mean Mongkut was overly concerned about race. It may have been natural for him to state the kind of fact which he had learned.

But by the time of Vajiravudh, race had become an important element in nationalistic programmes. *The Souvenir of the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition at Lumbini Park B.E. 2468*, the 1925 commemorative volume published at the end of Vajiravudh’s reign, put it candidly:

It was reported that the King had become very unpopular owing to at least three causes: his foreign extraction, for he was partly Chinese by birth; his appointment to those high offices which the Siamese considered should have been regarded, so to speak, as an heirloom for themselves ... the King was forced to his mental attitude, and, as a result, the conclusion was come to that it was a matter of absolute necessity that there should be a change ... [and] selected one of their own members as his successor ... Somdet Chao Phya Maha Krasat Seuk [Rama I].⁶³

In the early morning of 24 June 1932, a coup took place. The last absolute monarch, King Prajadhipok (Rama VII) and his Queen were at their seaside residence, Klai Kang Won (*Sanssouci*) Palace in Hua Hin, 190 kilometres south of Bangkok. A group of 100 Western-educated military officers, lawyers, and bureaucrats had assembled a People’s Party, or Khana Ratsadon.

They called themselves promoters (*phu ko kan*, short for *phu ko kan plian plaeng kan pokkhong*, literally, initiators of change in government). They took five days, from 24 to 28 June, to finish the task:

June 24: Captured power and held senior princes and ministers hostage.

June 25: Handed an ultimatum to the king to cede power and return to Bangkok.

June 26: Received the king’s agreement to sign a royal pardon for the coup’s promoters.

June 27: Had the king sign an interim constitution.

June 28: Convened parliament with seventy selected representatives and appointed Phraya Mano, a senior lawyer, as first Prime Minister of post-absolute monarchy Siam. Siam's short-lived absolute monarchy from Rama V to Rama VII (Chulalongkorn to Prajadhipok by way of Vajiravudh) had ended.⁶⁴ The nation was transformed by the People's Party, or *Khana ratsadon* into a "constitutional monarchy".⁶⁵

NOTES

1. Prasenjit Duara, "The Regime of Authenticity: Timelessness, Gender and National History in Modern China", *History & Theory* 37, no. 3 (1998), p. 287.
2. The word *Phongsawadan* is generally translated as chronicle. It combines two Pali-Sanskrit words: *vamsa* (line, family, king) and *avatāra* (reincarnation). The coining is *vamsāvatāra*, pronounced *phongsawadan* in Thai language. They mostly contain dynastic history, with stories of kings who are supposed to be reincarnations of Hindu gods. In the Thai case, the king is a reincarnation of Vishnu. See Charnvit Kasetsiri, "Thai Historiography from Ancient Times to the Modern Period", in *Perceptions of the Past in Southeast Asia*, edited by Anthony Reid and David Marr (Singapore: Asian Studies Association of Australia by Heinemann Educational Books, 1979). See also Chris Baker and Pasuk Phongpaichit, "Thailand in the Longue Durée", and Charnvit, "Thai Historiography", both in *Routledge Handbook of Contemporary Thailand*, edited by Pavin Chachavalpongpun (London and New York: Routledge – Taylor & Francis Group, 2020). See also Craig J. Reynolds, "Nation and State in Histories of Nation-Building, with Special Reference to Thailand", in *Nation-Building Five Southeast Asian Histories*, edited by Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), p. 26.
3. See *Wilatwong Phongsabut, Prawatisat thai chan matayom suksa ton plai* [Thai History for Secondary Schools] (Bangkok: Thaiwatanapanich, 1976).
4. See also Thongchai Winichakul, "The Changing Landscape of the Past: New Histories in Thailand Since 1973", *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 26, no. 1 (March 1995): 99–120.
5. See King Mongkut's article "Brief History of Siam, with a detail of the leading events in its Annals", written by the king himself; however, the English was gone over by a certain missionary named W.D. (?). Therefore, it does not have the kind of flavour like most of the king's writings. The article was

- published in *The Chinese Repository* XX, No. 7 (July 1851): 315–63. At the end of the article, the editor has included a very favourable report of the king’s ascension to the throne, printed from the Singapore Free Press.
6. It is revealing to compare of the position of two Thai kings, Vajiravudh and Narai, who lived 200 years apart. Vajiravudh dated his dynastic state/nation Ratanakosin-Chakri back 700 years to Sukhothai in the thirteenth century, comprising a space within the boundaries of modern Siam. King Narai (1656–88) of the Ayutthya-Prasatthong dynasty went back further, to the eighth century, and extended the nation to Cambodia. For Narai if a golden age existed, it was not in Sukhothai, but Angkor. See Michael Smithies and Dhiravat na Pombejra, “Instructions Given to the Siamese Envoys Sent to Portugal, 1684”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 90, no. 1&2 (2002). See rendering into Thai by Michael Wright in *Sinlapa Watthanathem* 26, no. 4 (February 2005); and by Phuthorn Bhumadhon, “Ruang na ru samai somdet phra Narai” [Interesting stories from the time of King Narai], an unpublished paper given at a seminar on King Narai, Lopburi, February 2011.
 7. See A. Cecil Carter, *The Kingdom of Siam 1904* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1904).
 8. See *Khlong Phap Phraratchaphongsawadan* [Poems and Painting from Chronicles], 5th ed. (Bangkok, Amarin Printing, 1983; first printing 1887). I am indebted to Dr Sunait Chutintranond of Chulalongkorn University for pointing this out to me.
 9. Suphanni Kanchanathiti, *Bannanukrom Babb Rien Visha Prawatisat Khong Krasuang Suksatikarn Tang Tae B.E. 2440–2512* [Bibliography of the Ministry of Education’s History Textbooks from 1897 to 1969] (Bangkok: Ministry of Education, 1970).
 10. *Ibid.*
 11. *Ibid.*
 12. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).
 13. *Ibid.*, see his section on “Official Nationalism and Imperialism”, pp. 99–100.
 14. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
 15. Ironically, Prince Damrong (1862–1943) is popularly labelled as Phra Bida Haeng Prawatisat Thai, meaning Royal Father of Thai history. The prince never fully accepted the newly coined word *prawatisat*, corresponding to the English “history”. He remained committed to Phongsawadan (popularly taken as meaning chronicle) until the end.
 16. See translation by Oskar Frankfurter, “The Story of the Records of Siamese History”, in *Miscellaneous Articles Written for the Journal of the Siam Society*

- by His Royal Highness Prince Damrong (Bangkok: Siam Society, 1962), p. 31.
17. Prince Damrong mistook the word Lao for Lawa. The two are ethnically and linguistically different. Lao belongs to the Tai-Lao family and Lawa is Mon-Khmer. He went on to ask, “Who were the original Khmers and Lāo? To-day we only know that the peoples designated under the names of Kha, Khamu, Cambodians, Mons and Meng all speak languages which are of Khmer stock. We may conclude, therefore, that these peoples are descended from the Khmers. As for the original Lāo, they are to be identified in the people styled today Luã or Lawā...”. See “History of Siam in the Period Antecedent to the Founding of Ayuddhya by King Phra Chao U Thong”, in *Miscellaneous Articles Written for the Journal of the Siam Society by His Royal Highness Prince Damrong*, p. 49.
 18. Ibid., p. 50.
 19. Ibid., p. 60.
 20. Ibid., p. 60.
 21. Ibid., p. 61.
 22. Strangely, Nan Chao (Nanzhao) names of kings do not sound Thai, and that Nan Chao kings had naming customs different from the Thais. For example, the three names of its famous warrior kings: (A) Sheng-lo-pi; (B) P’i-lo-ko; and (C) Ko-lo-fung. The last word of (A) becomes the first of (B), and the last of (B) becomes first of (C). This is probably a genealogy, signalling succession from father to son. This naming custom was unknown in old or modern Siam. Prince Damrong dismissed this issue with only a casual remark. He stated: “As regards the Chinese rendering of the names of the Thai kings, it is quite impossible to say what were the various equivalents in the Thai language”, *ibid.*, p. 65.
 23. Ibid., p. 65.
 24. Ibid.
 25. See Phya Anuman Rajadhon, *Ruang khong chart Thai* [Story of the Thai Nation] (Bangkok: 1940 first printing).
 26. Craig J. Reynolds, “Plot of Thai History: Theory and Practice”, in *Patterns and Illusions: Thai History and Thought*, edited by Gehan Wijeyewardene and E.C. Chapman (Singapore: Richard Davis Fund and Department of Anthropology, Research School of Pacific Studies, The Australian National University, 1992), p. 314.
 27. For details on Hollywood films and plays about Anna Leonowens and King Mongkut, see note 9 in Chapter 3.
 28. See Phaitoon and Wilatwong Phongsabut, *Prathet Khong Rao* [Our Country]

(Bangkok: Thai Watthana, 1992), pp. 2–5. As mentioned above, the theory that China was the original homeland of the Thai and their mighty kingdom was Nan Chao, was finally accepted by Prince Damrong in 1914. The idea was further developed by Luang Wichitwathakan in the 1930s and 1940s, especially after the 1932 coup overthrowing the absolute monarchy. It became a monstrous Thai past, attached with nationalistic emotion during the first Phibun regime (1938–43) when even the official name of the country, Siam, was changed to Thailand in 1939. The theory remained unchallenged through the 1950s until in 1964 when Frederick W. Mote, a senior China Historian at Princeton University, criticized its validity in his short, but influential, article “Problems of Thai Prehistory”, *Sangkomsat Parithat* 2, no. 2 (October 1964). The idea of original homeland, however, remained influential within academic circles. See also *Lak Thai* [Thai Pillars], a highly influential text on the Thai original homeland by Khun Wichitmatra (Sa-nga Kanchanakhaphan; 1897–1980). The book was given a literary prize by King Prajadhipok in 1928. See also Charles Backus, *The Nan-chao kingdom and T'ang China's Southern Frontier* (Redwood Burn Ltd., Trowbridge, Wiltshire: Cambridge Studies in Chinese history, Literature, and Institutions, 1981), pp. 47–52. For more discussion on the original homeland of the Thai, see, for example, Chalong Sutharavanich, “Ruang chon chat thai: khamtham thi tong chuy kan top” [The Thai ethnic group: Questions to be answered], an unpublished paper given at the Chulalongkorn University Conference, October 1990. See Chris Baker, “From Yeu to Tai”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 90, no. 1&2 (2002) and Grant Evans, “The Ai-Lao and Nan Chao/Thai Kingdom: A Re-orientation”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 102 (2014).

29. The word *borankhadi*, which is now taken to mean archaeology, reveals an inherent connection between race and homeland. It means studies or affairs of old things. Since old things were labelled as Mon or Khmer, Thais must originally be from elsewhere.
30. A good account of the early years of the Siam Society is by William Warren, *The Siam Society: A Century* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 2004).
31. The library's name is usually translated as “National Library”. However, in Thai it is the Library for Phra Nakhon (Nagara), meaning for Bangkok and/or for the capital, which further implies that it belongs to the dynastic, rather than the national realm.
32. The best positive account of Vajiravudh in English is by Walter F. Vella, *Chaiyo! King Vajiravudh and the Development of Thai Nationalism* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1978). On his official nationalism, see more in Anderson's *Imagined Communities* (cited above) and Kullada Kedboonchoo,

“Official Nationalism under King Chulalongkorn”, paper presented at the International Conference on Thai Studies, Canberra, 1987; also see her *The Rise and Decline of Thai Absolutism* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2004). The book is translated into Thai as *Somburanayasitthirat: Wiwatthakan rat Thai* (Fah diew kan, 2019). See also Stephen L.W. Greene, *Absolute Dreams: Thai Government Under Rama VI, 1910–1925* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1999), and a provocative new treatment of the inner court life of Vajiravudh by Chanan Yodhongs, *Nai nai nai samai ratchakan thi 6* [Inner Men in the Reign of King Rama VI] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2013).

33. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.
34. Ibid. See his discussion on “print-capitalism” in Chapter 3, “The Origins of National Consciousness”.
35. Benedict Anderson remarks that Vajiravudh’s triad echoes the theme of late Tsarist Russia, Autocracy, Orthodoxy and Nationality, but in reverse order. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 101. Many Thais believe that the king copied the English slogan of God, King, and Country, adapting it in a different order in Thai language.
36. See Krommakhun Phitthayalab, *Huakho prawatisat phak 1* [Headings of History, Part 1], 1917. The author claimed that he first saw this word used by Ramchitti, one of King Vajiravudh’s many pen names, published in *Witthayachan*, no. 16, p. 104.
37. Vajiravudh, *Ruang thieo muang phra ruang* [A Tour of the Phra Ruang Country] (first printing 1908; 12th printing 1983), p. 97.
38. Ibid. See the preface by Vajiravudh himself. Here, the prince assumed the pen name: Ram Vajiravudh. One must wonder whether the prince had, by this time, come to identify himself with Rama of the Ramayana as well as King Ramkhamhaeng of Sukhothai. He seems to have merged the present with the past. Vajiravudh also started the traditions of naming Chakri kings Rama and numbering them as Rama I, II, III to Rama X.

In the heated debate over whether the King Ramkhamhaeng Inscription is genuine, Dr Piriya Krairiksh used the writings of Vajiravudh along with his extensive study of the context of the Inscription, to question the validity of the famous stone, which had become the foundation of the modern Thai state and Sukhothai historiography. See the huge volume by James R. Chamberlain, *The Ram Khamhaeng Controversy* (Bangkok: The Siam Society, 1991).

39. See the discussion of “royal-official-ultra nationalist historiography”, in “Constructing the Ideal State: The Idea of Sukhothai in Thai History, 1833–1957”, by Bryce Beemer (unpublished MA thesis, University of Hawaii,

- Manoa, 1999); see also Mukhom Wongthes, *Intellectual Might and National Myth: A Forensic Investigation of the Ram Khamhaeng Controversy in Thai Society* (Bangkok: Matichon, 2003).
40. See Vella, *Chaiyo!* Ch. 3.
 41. See Vajiravudh, *Ruang thieo muang phra ruang*.
 42. See *Bot Lakhon Phud Kham Klon Phra Ruang* [The Rhyming Play of Phra Ruang] (Bangkok: Aksornsampan, 1974; first printing 1917).
 43. Vella, *Chaiyo!* p. 212.
 44. See Vajiravudh, *Ruang thao saenpom* [The king who had a hundred thousand bumps on his body] (Phra Nakhon: Sophonpipatthanakorn, 1925).
 45. See Yupa Chumchantra, “Prawatisat nipon thai B.E. 2475–2516” [Thai Historiography, 1932–1973] (unpublished MA thesis, Chulalongkorn University, 1987), p. 23.
 46. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
 47. For K.S.R. Kularb, see Craig J. Reynolds, “The Case of K.S.R. Kularb: A Challenge to Royal Historical Writing in Late Nineteenth Century Thailand”, *Journal of the Siam Society* 61, no. 2 (July 1973): 63–90. For Thianwan, see Walter F. Vella, “Thianwan of Siam: A Man Who Fought Giants”, in *Anuson Walter Vella*, edited by Ronald D. Renard (Honolulu: University of Hawaii, 1986), pp. 78–91; see also Yuangrat and Paul Wedel, *Radical Thought, Thai Mind: The Development of Revolutionary Ideas in Thailand* (Bangkok: Assumption Business Administration College, 1987), pp. 23–36. For Thai language sources, see Chai-Anan Samudavanija, *Chiwit lae ngan khong Thianwan lae K.S.R. Kularb* [Lives and Works of Thianwan and K.S.R. Kularb] (Bangkok: Teeranan, 1979); also, Mananya Thanaphum, *K.S.R. Kularb* (Bangkok: Social Science Association of Thailand, 1982).
 48. Reynolds, “The Case of K.S.R. Kularb”.
 49. “Madness” has been conspicuously diagnosed in those who oppose a ruling elite’s ideology. During the reign of King Mongkut (Rama IV), Somdet To of Wat Rakhang was one of these “mad” individuals. He was reputed to be critical of the court of King Mongkut and expressed his antagonism by carrying a lamp in the middle of the day, implying that there was darkness in the middle of the day. During the Fifth Reign (Chulalongkorn), it was Kularb and, later, Narin for the Sixth Reign (Vajiravudh); see note 60 below.
 50. Reynolds, “The Case of K.S.R. Kularb”, p. 87.
 51. *Ayatiwat* (Growth or Progress), reprint by the Thai Club of Japan, 1993. See the informative introduction on the life and work of Kularb by Nakharin Mektrirat. See also my “Siam/Civilization—Thailand/Globalization: Things to come?”, *Thammasat Review* 5, no. 1 (2000); reprinted in my work, Charnvit

- Kasetsiri, *Studies in Thai and Southeast Asian Histories* (Bangkok: The Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Foundation, 2015).
52. Ibid.
 53. The best treatment on this topic is by Matthew P. Copeland, “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam” (unpublished Ph. thesis, Australian National University, 1993). I am indebted to Prani Wongsdes for bringing this to my attention.
 54. Ibid., p. 11.
 55. Ibid., p. 45.
 56. Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 100–1.
 57. Copeland, “Contested Nationalism and the 1932 Overthrow of the Absolute Monarchy in Siam”, p. 43.
 58. Vella, *Chaiyo!* p. 111.
 59. Ibid., p. 113.
 60. Sakdina Chatkul na Ayudhya, *Narin Klung khon khwang lok* [Narin: A man against the world] (Bangkok, Matichon, 1993). See a new interpretation of Narin by Peter Koret (1960–2020), *The Man Who Accused the King of Killing a Fish: The Biography of Narin Phasit of Siam, 1874–1950* (Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 2012).
 61. Yupa Chumchantra, “Prawatisat nipon thai B.E. 2475–2516”, p. 52.
 62. See note 5 above: “Brief History of Siam, with a detail of the leading events in its Annals”, p. 351.
 63. *The Souvenir of the Siamese Kingdom Exhibition at Lumbini Park B.E. 2468* (Bangkok: Krungthep Daily Mail, 1927), p. 42. Narin lived until 1950, dying at the age of seventy-six. Many joined him in restoring Taksin to a place in Thai history. Over the course of this effort, the linear royal line had to be adjusted to include the period when Taksin’s seat of power was across the river from Rama I’s Rattanakosin (present-day Bangkok). The line of kingdoms now comprised Sukhothai, Ayutthaya, Thonburi, and Rattanakosin. On 17 April 1954, during Phibun’s government, a statue of Taksin, galloping on horseback, with a sword-bearing arm raised, was officially inaugurated. His effigy followed statues of the three Chakri kings: Chulalongkorn, Rama I, and Vajiravudh, in that order.
 64. See Chapters 6 and 7 of Chaiyan Rajchagool, *The Rise and Fall of the Thai Absolute Monarchy* (Bangkok: White Lotus, 1994). See also a pioneer work by Thawatt Mokarapong, *History of the Thai Revolution: A Study in Political Behaviour* (Bangkok: Chalermnit, 1972). A thorough, sympathetic work of this period is found in Benjamin A. Batson, *The End of Absolute Monarchy in Siam* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1984). Batson’s book was translated

into Thai language in 2000 and published under the auspices of the Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Foundation.

In the 1990s, renewed interest and reinterpretations of the 1932 events showed up among academics. For example, see books by Nakarin Mektrairat, *Kan Patiwat Sayam 2475* [1932 Revolution in Siam] (1992); Charnvit Kasetsiri, *2475 Kan Patiwat Sayam* [1932 Revolution in Siam] (1992); Thamrongsak Phetlertanan, *2475 Lae 1 Pi Lang kanpatiwat* [1932 Revolution and the Aftermath] (2000); Charnvit Kasetsiri and Thamrongsak Phetlertanan, *Patiwat 2475* [1932 Revolution in Siam] (2004); all published by the Social Sciences and Humanities Textbooks Foundation. See a recent debate on when Thailand became a nation-state only after the 1932 Revolution by Somkiat Wanthana et al., *Mua dai chung pen chat Thai* [Becoming a Thai Nation, when?] (Bangkok: Illumination, 2021). See also Phinyaphan Potchanalawan, *Kamnoed prathet Thai phaitai phadetkan* [Birth of Thailand under dictatorship] (Bangkok: Matichon, 2015). See two provoking ideas on Thai historiography by Nidhi Eosewong, *Prawattisat haeng chat som chabab kao sang chabab mai* [National history: Repair the old version and remake the new] (Bangkok: Ministry of Culture, 2006), and by Somsak Jiemthirasakul, *Prawattosot phueng sang* [Just invented histories] (Bangkok: Fah Diew Kan, 2011).

See also an extremely interesting treatment, a bestseller, on the royalist anti-1932 coup movement by Nutthapon Jaijing, *Kho fanfai fai fan an lua chua* [To dream the unbelievable dream] (Bangkok, 2013).

65. In the 2020–21 protest against the Prayut Chan-o-cha government, a good number of young activists prefer to use the word *ratsadon* instead of *prachachon*, meaning the people. Therefore, they see themselves in line of having the same political desire as the 1932 *khana ratsadon* revolutionary group.

Therefore, the so-called 2020s new young generation Z has become fascinated by the 1932 revolutionary promoters. In their protests against the Prayut Chan-o-cha government and their demand for monarchy reform, they have been referring to examples of those old *khana ratsadon* (The People’s Party).

See, for example, Peera Songkunnatham, “The Law Ought to Be King”, *Boston Review*, 1 October 2020, <http://bostonreview.net/global-justice/peera-songkunnatham-the-law-ought-be-king>; Supalak Ganjanakhundee, “Youthquake Evokes the 1932 Revolution and Shakes Thailand’s Establishment”, *ISEAS Perspective*, no. 2020/127, 6 November 2020, https://www.iseas.edu.sg/wp-content/uploads/2020/10/ISEAS_Perspective_2020_127.pdf; Kanokrat Lertchoosakul, “The White Ribbon Movement: High School Students in the

2020 Thai Youth Protests”, *Critical Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2021): 206–18; Duncan McCargo, “Disruptors’ Dilemma? Thailand’s 2020 Gen Z Protests”, *Critical Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2021): 175–91, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14672715.2021.1876522>; Wolfram Schaffar and Praphakorn Wongratanawin, “The Milk Tea Alliance: A New Transnational Pro-Democracy Movement against Chinese-Centered Globalization?”, *Austrian Journal of South-East Asian Studies* 14, no. 1 (2021): 5–35; Aim Sinpeng, “Hashtag Activism: Social Media and the #Freeyouth Protests in Thailand”, *Critical Asian Studies* 53, no. 2 (2021), <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/14672715.2021.1882866>